

AN: It's time for everyone's favourite detective to do what he does best: investigate! Can TPYMK figure out what's going on with the drug operation? Let's find out!

Poison

New Strain

Detective TPYMK had seen some pretty weird things in his life, but the idea of a Sumu lab in the middle of the desert was one of the more outlandish notions he'd ever heard of. He'd seen drug-fuelled parties in warehouses and staff-wielding wizards in bars – but this really took the cake. He wondered if anything could surprise him now.

I hate the desert, TPYMK thought to himself, shaking his leg free of the deep sand that surrounded him on all sides. The moon had fully risen, and it was the middle of the night, so the detective was lucky that the desert wasn't incredibly hot. He could be burning to death right now. Suddenly, being knee-deep in sand didn't seem so bad after all.

It's gotta be up here, he mused, keeping an eye out for any sort of building amongst the seemingly endless plain of dull sand. A Sumu lab wasn't the type of thing that could be easily hidden in the desert. Unless it was buried underground. *That* certainly would have been a surprise.

TPYMK trudged through the sand, hoping that Sarafina would have collected some information from the local users while he was gone. Preferably without getting high, as she had done in the past.

But that was the thing with Sarafina. Ever since TPYMK had first met her, he knew that her drug addiction – particularly with Sumu – was strong. The drug was a vicious one, that was for certain. Once you started using, you couldn't stop.

However, TPYMK was hopeful that he could remedy that. Maybe it *was* possible for someone like Sarafina to successfully abstain from using the drug. She had a strong will. TPYMK knew that from the various arguments they'd had during the course of their current, almost catastrophic partnership together.

You know she won't listen, he reminded himself, thinking of how weak-willed Sarafina was. She would succumb to something as simple and vile as a marijuana joint in a matter of seconds. If she couldn't resist a joint, then how on earth would she be able to stay away from the deadly dangers of Sumu?

She's probably puking in her sleep right now.

TPYMK tried not to think about that. As much as he thought of Sarafina as a complete waste of space, he couldn't deny that he felt... attached to her in some way. Like a friend – albeit a very unpleasant and foul-smelling one. He couldn't really explain it properly. Maybe it wasn't *meant* to be explained properly. It was just one of those weird relationships that happened sometimes. The detective's life was certainly an odd one...

The detective stared straight ahead, amazed that he hadn't spotted something yet. *Jeez, how do they carry their drugs across this desert without dying in the heat? It must be miles away... I can't see anything!*

TPYMK was about to consider turning around and heading back for the jungle, when he suddenly ended up stumbling forwards.

"Jesus!"

TPYMK gripped the end of a tall rock jutting out from the ground, narrowly avoiding plummeting from the edge of an unseen cliff. The sand had perfectly obscured it.

"Whoa..."

The detective stared downwards, spotting an enormous canyon below. There had been no sign of it until now. His attention was instantly focused on a tall industrial building that stood at the bottom of the canyon, clear steam billowing out from a few chimney stacks placed on top.

TPYMK smiled. *Gotcha.*

He'd found what he was looking for.

This must be it, he thought, craning his neck to get a good look at the building. It was obviously tailored for producing some sort of chemical compound. The link with Sumu was unmistakeable. *So this is what a Sumu lab looks like.*

The detective searched the area for any sort of way down. There had to be, otherwise how on earth would the drugs be transported to and from the lab?

He eventually spotted a steep rocky incline a few metres to his side. It acted almost like a ramp, easily allowing access from the top of the cliff to the bottom. Whoever ran this Sumu lab was very well organised. They'd obviously thought of everything.

TPYMK quietly slid down the incline, careful not to make any sort of loud noise that might attract unwanted attention.

When he reached the bottom – his beige trenchcoat stained with yellow residue from the dusty sand – he stood up, surveying the lab. He wanted to check if there were any guards protecting the perimeter. Knowing how organised this drug operation was, it was highly likely that there would be high class security.

Doesn't look like there's anything, he thought, slowly approaching the lab at a cautious pace. He wouldn't be surprised if a bunch of angry grizzly bears pounced on him there and then. These drug manufacturers were unpredictable. Anything could happen...

Eventually, TPYMK crept over to the side of the lab, pressing his back up against the metallic wall. He looked left and right, still keeping an eye out for any unexpected arrivals.

Still nothing.

Curious – and now somewhat paranoid – TPYMK leaned forward, peering around a corner.

That was when he spotted someone.

Suppressing the urge to gasp, TPYMK hugged the wall again. He bit down on his lip, hoping that the person hadn't spotted him. That was the last thing he wanted. To get shot and buried in the middle of the desert by a bunch of criminals.

Ever so slowly, TPYMK poked his head around the corner again. Luckily for him, the person he saw wasn't looking in his direction.

It was a lion, although the most noticeable thing about him was the fact that he held a magical staff in his paw. The detective recognised him instantly.

Hago, he thought, knowing his name very well. He'd come across this very same lion once in a bar, when he was hanging around with a lacklustre criminal called the Interceptor. He'd ended up fighting a bunch of criminals off. *So he works here?*

The hot air had dried TPYMK's mouth up, reminding him that it had been a while since he'd last drank a bottle of chocolate milk. What he'd give for one right now... Still, he had a job to do. Consuming his favourite beverage could wait until later.

Hago shifted impatiently on his paws. It looked as though he was waiting for someone to arrive. He had clearly been there for quite some time already. TPYMK could only watch with curiosity. *What on earth is he doing?*

"*There* you are!" Hago sighed, as someone stepped into view from the shadows. "What was taking so long?"

"I was tying the elephants down," replied a rather proper voice. "In all honesty, it's a job that's not suited to my tastes. I would rather be organising the chemical supplies."

"Well, Scar, we don't have that many people working here," Hago said. "Death likes to keep everything quiet and low-key. It's supposed to be a secret operation."

"And yet there are plenty of those filthy *dealers* that could be doing such forms of hard labour," Scar complained, scraping a paw across the sand. "Instead, they make intelligent chemists like us do all the dirty work."

"You're paid well, Scar," Hago reminded him. "I don't see what the big problem is."

"Oh, forget it," Scar said. "Why did you even bother to wait for me, anyway? Shouldn't you be cooking another batch?"

They're both Sumu cooks? TPYMK thought, eyes widening in surprise. *How did two idiots like them ever end up getting this kind of job? They must have been pretty drunk that time in the bar...*

"The boss has given me an announcement to make," Hago revealed, much to TPYMK's interest. "Since you're the only other cook, there isn't much point in me talking to myself. Don't you think so? Or is your brain too small to comprehend that?"

Scar growled loudly at Hago. "Don't talk down to me," he spat, brushing past the wizard. "Now, let's get inside. I can only imagine what *wonders* our leader has to enlighten us with this time..."

"You'll see," said Hago, as the two disappeared into the building.

TPYMK narrowed his eyes, thinking things through. *I have to hear what they're talking about*, he thought.

It was obviously something important. If this was where Sumu was produced, then something huge had to be happening with the production of it. Something that would most likely result in higher sales and more users for whoever ran the operation. He certainly sounded like an evil genius... TPYMK wished that he would show himself.

The detective turned around, quickly walking along the side of the building so he could find some sort of side or back entrance to get in. Walking in through the front was definitely not an option. If there weren't guards outside, then there were certainly bound to be a few of them *inside*. You couldn't just leave a drug lab without some form of security...

TPYMK soon realised that there was no sort of entrance on this particular wall. Not even an air vent he could climb into... That would have been a viable option – even if it did make him look like some sort of cheesy action movie star.

"Damn it..."

TPYMK was about to give up and try the front entrance when the sound of clattering metal rang out from underneath him.

The detective lifted up his shoe, discovering a metal grate built into the ground. It was nowhere near big enough for him to fit through – but it would certainly give him a perfect view of whatever lay inside.

TPYMK knelt down, brushing away some sand that obscured the grate. He stuck his face up to the metallic surface, peering inside.

Below was what seemed to be a laboratory of some kind. It was filled with an assortment of scientific technology. The detective assumed that it was all used to produce Sumu. Perhaps other drugs – such as methamphetamine and cocaine – too. Hago and Scar were stood on the red tiled floor, speaking with each other.

"Things are changing, Scar," Hago told the lion. TPYMK could just about hear his voice; the volume from above wasn't exactly the best. "Death isn't happy with the way things are progressing."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Scar rasped. "We simply cook the Sumu – there's nothing more to it."

"He wants more customers," Hago explained. "They're not living long enough, he says."

"So what?" Scar retorted. "That's hardly *our* problem. The drug is *supposed* to be fatal. It's chemically produced that way."

"He wants us to create a new strain," Hago said. "One that will increase the life expectancy of a Sumu user, while also increasing the strength of the addiction."

"Is that even possible?" Scar wondered.

"Yes," Hago said, "with the right scientific mind. While you were off tending to the exportation elephants, I was busy altering the formula."

"You altered the formula?" said Scar. "I'm surprised you managed to accomplish that without my superior intellect."

"Go get eaten by hyenas," Hago snapped.

"I'm not that stupid," was Scar's response. "So, tell me: by how much did you increase the life expectancy?"

"From four months to seven months," Hago said. "That's about the best you can do without inducing an instant heart attack or a fatal case of vomiting."

"I see," said Scar, placing a paw to his chin. "And how much of this new strain did you manage to produce?"

Hago shook his head. "Only a pound. I need two pairs of paws. It's gonna be a lot harder to produce such a specific formula this time. This kind of Sumu will leave you on the edge of death from the moment you use it. Death works us too hard."

Scar chuckled. "At least it'll mean a raise for us," he said optimistically. "He always pays us the most."

Hago grinned. "Indeed. We'll be making *millions* by the end of the year!"

The two villains laughed evilly, their cackles echoing through the lab.

TPYMK sat back, thinking about what dangers a new Sumu formula could pose to the world. It would be even worse than before...

Clang!

TPYMK let out a gasp as he leant back against a metal barrel, which he didn't even realise was there. It fell over, spilling its liquid contents onto the ground.

"Damn," TPYMK cursed, clambering to his feet. He caught notice of the name that had been stamped onto the barrel: 'methylamine'. A common chemical used in the manufacture of drugs.

"What was that?" Hago's voice could be heard from down below.

"Sounds like someone's up there," Scar said.

TPYMK quickly sprinted off into the desert, not even bothering to look back. Besides, he'd heard enough, and he didn't want to particularly fight off those two nasty bad guys again.

Let's just hope you've got something for me, Sarafina, he thought. 'Cause I'm gonna kill you if you just got high.

To Be Continued...

AN: So it appears that a new strain of Sumu is being produced. By Hago and Scar, no less! You knew they were shady characters... At least TPYMK didn't get himself killed. Sarafina just might, though. Ooh, she shouldn't have got high...

NEXT TIME: A shot causes problems for Sarafina...